A brief history of Montmorency

When the land was first subdivided in the late 1830's, Stuart A Donaldson (1812-1867), first premier of NSW, purchased land and named it "Montmorenci Estate", after the town where French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau had lived, in France.



"The Montmorenci Estate, Port Phillip"

A plan of the original 925 acre Crown Grant to S.A. Donaldson on 5th February, 1840 superimposed onto a satellite image of the district.

Click on the image for a larger version

Donaldson never lived on "Montmorenci Estate". References have been made to "The prolific forest on Montmorency Estate". As can be seen from the newspaper excerpt below, the land was considered worthy of comparison with neighbouring properties; however, the advertisement makes no effort to promote the suitability of the property for any particular farming endeavour, which may suggest that Donaldson did little to improve the land after acquiring the Crown Grant on the 5th February 1840. Those with a keen eye will note that the auction advertisement is dated 28th March 1840 - less than two months after its acquisition from the Crown. A prime example of the land speculation that was rife in the new colony at that time.

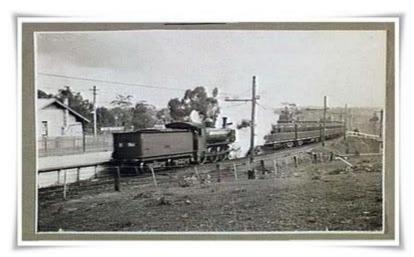


An excerpt from "The Sydney Gazette and NSW Advertiser newspaper 28th March 1840 (page 3). Note the spelling of Montmorency.

In the 1840's, the land was sold to Judge James Donnithorne (1773-1852) who ran the farm through Managers. He never lived there. On his death, the property was left to his daughter Elizabeth E. Donnithorne. Prior to her father's death, Elizabeth E. Donnithorne (1826-1886), who was engaged to be married, was jilted at the altar. She lived the remainder of her life (approx 35 years) as a recluse in New South Wales. Charles Dickens's, Miss Havisham, in his book Great Expectations, is said to be based on Elizabeth's life.

The land was sold some time after her death in 1886. In her will, she stipulated "the land was not to be sold until land prices increased". The next owner may have been Mr Britnell. In 1907, the property was subdivided and sold by Mr Britnell. It was about this time that Montmorency and Briar Hill then became independent suburbs in their own right from the district known as Greensborough.





Photos of Montmorency Railway Station (ca 1923-1928) State Library of Victoria

A few milestones in Montmorency's history:

- Presbyterian Church built in 1917.
- Primary school opened 1922.
- Post office opened 1923
- Railway station constructed in 1923
- Electricity connected in 1926
- St Faith's private school, in Mountain View Road, opened 1917 and run by Miss Green

The above article was prepared by June Hall, leader of the Society's oral history group. As is the case with the research of historic places like Montmorency, there are the inevitable gaps in the records of history including those elusive early photographs of the district, family stories and records of people and events.